

Project Summary

Provide a summary (one-page maximum) that describes key elements of the project and states the total project cost.

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In late 2006, the American Land Conservancy (ALC) was contacted by the Preston Family regarding the sale of a conservation easement in southern Mariposa County. The Preston Family homesteaded the 4,005 acre ranch (initially 160 acres) in the mid-1850's and has run cattle on the property since. ALC is applying for a Category 2 Strategic Opportunity Grant of \$7,500 to cover the cost of an appraisal. ALC is requesting the Executive Officer to authorize this grant given the timing of this project.

The primary resources are ecological and agricultural. Roughly 60 percent of the 4,005 acres is oak woodland; the remaining land is annual grassland with potential for vernal pools. A number of species use these oak woodlands for habitat including deer, wild pigs, dove, quail, geese, raptors, and rodents.

The Preston Family has been raising cattle on the ranch for over 150 years. Present use is a full calving cattle ranch with calve weaning weights averaging 650 pounds. The third generation currently manages the ranch, but is expected to be joined by members of the fourth generation in the coming years. The family has utilized responsible land stewardship practices during its tenure, protecting habitat along the way.

This project is near conservation easements held by the Sierra Foothill Conservancy (SFC) and the California Rangeland Trust (CRT), as well as The Nature Conservancy's Merced Grasslands project. This project is also within an area that has been identified as critical and important for protection by the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition.

ALC will be partnering with the California Rangeland Trust (CRT) on the overall project; CRT will be holding the conservation easement. ALC is in discussions with the California Farmland Conservancy Program and the Department of Fish and Game, Region 4 (for Wildlife Conservation Board Oak Woodlands Conservation Program funding) for conservation easement funding.

This project would contribute to the protection and restoration of rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water, and other natural resources by helping to protect a considerable landscape in the Yosemite foothills. This project would also further conservation efforts started by SFC and CRT. Furthermore, this project would address the SNC program goal of aiding in the preservation of working landscapes.